Foreword

Can a poet focus on local detail and take us around the globe? What is it, that power of poetry, which, according to Boris Pasternak, can “take us across the borders, smashing those borders”? How do the poets do it? Welcome to Jeff Streeby’s *An Atlas of the Interior*.

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Where are we? We are in Aleppo, Syria, and “Nosing after milk, the big colt batters her udder again.” Then we are in June of 1686. Then, Nebraska. And it is always summer, “a harmonica in my saddlebag.” It is also El Paso and “the dead horse’s hide is wet with sweat.” And elsewhere on these pages Albert Camus imagines Sisyphus happy. Where is he? In Iowa? “A darkness. A drive home. A catchy song on the radio. Faces. Places. I hope I will remember such things when at last the colder proposition embedded in the world’s geology comes home to me,” says the voice in the background, and we see “darkness implied in every flame.”

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What kind of Atlas is this? A description of a few snapshots from the window of time machine? No. These are few pages of a poetry manuscript, which knows, as Ezra Pound once knew, that in modern poetic consideration of history, everything must happen at once.

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But Pound also told us, emphatically, that if poetry is to last, it must have an emptive power, it is “only the feeling that survives.” And, so in these pages we find ourselves in the intersection of time and place, but it is emotion that makes this intersection larger than what it is: “after supper, your father announces to you, out of the blue, that by summer he will be dead.” Yes, it is always summer. So, what is grief, then?

Grief—
the uncomfortable furniture of devotion
to rearrange.

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And, who is the poet here? Someone who tells us: